

N.O. Court Fire Destroys Records

By JAMES HEARTY

A pre-dawn fire of undetermined origin caused considerable damage to the office of the clerk of the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals today, destroying some court records.

The office is located in the Wild Life and Fisheries Building at 400 Royal. The federal government leases part of the building from the state.

Firemen had the 5:30 a. m. blaze under control within an hour. First Dis-

trict Fire Chief Bernard Nicolay said the fire was confined to the one office, although some other areas of the five-story building suffered water damage.

The appeals court, which had four cases on today's docket, heard the cases as scheduled. The courtroom was not damaged.

A court spokesman said employees assigned to the clerk's office will work in temporary quarters elsewhere in the building.

A LARGE AMOUNT of debris filled

the halls and stairwells of the building, at first leading some observers to believe an explosion had occurred. But firemen said there was no evidence of an explosion and most of the debris was plaster which fell from the walls and ceilings when heavy streams of water were used to extinguish the fire.

The court's records room is across the hall from the fire scene and was not damaged but some court records were filed in the clerk's office.

A court spokesman said 90 per cent of the records kept in the burned office previously had been copied and that the copies were not damaged. The remaining 10 per cent presumably were destroyed.

ISAAC E. FREZEL, a building guard, said he made his normal rounds through the building at about 5 a. m. and saw no evidence of a fire. Frezel said he first learned of the fire when policemen entered the

building at about 5:30 a. m. The policemen apparently spotted the blaze from the street.

The alarm was turned in by police on their radio.

Nicolay said nine pieces of equipment were called to fight the fire.

THE DISTRICT chief said several firemen suffered minor injuries from falling glass but continued to fight the blaze. They received first aid treatment later.

The U.S. District Court, which is lodged in courtrooms on the third floor of the building, continued activities today after cleanup operations.

The district court clerk's office, located on the third floor directly under the 5th Circuit Court clerk's office, was in line for a massive cleanup job. Firemen covered desks in the office but water still was seeping down from the fourth floor at mid-morning.